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Recommended Citation

Vialle, Wilma and Howard, Steven J., "A longitudinal examination of the outcomes for gifted students in the Wollongong Youth Study" (2014). *Faculty of Social Sciences - Papers*. 2040.
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Abstract

Abstract presented at the 14th International ECHA Conference, 17-20 September, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Keywords

youth, examination, study, wollongong, gifted, longitudinal, students, outcomes

Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

Vialle, W. & Howard, S. (2014). A longitudinal examination of the outcomes for gifted students in the Wollongong Youth Study. In M. Jurisevic (Eds.), *Re:Thinking Giftedness: Giftedness in the Digital Age Programme and Abstract Book* (pp. 179-180). Ljubljana, Slovenia: European Council for High Ability.

A Longitudinal Examination of the Outcomes for Gifted Students in the Wollongong Youth Study

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The Wollongong Youth Study is an eight-year longitudinal study that examined the relationships among personality factors, social support and emotional well-being on the social, emotional and academic outcomes of 900 young people. The study aimed to determine the combination of factors that would best predict positive outcomes for the students as they left school and entered their post-schooling lives. This paper focuses on the research question of what factors are related to the achievements of gifted students compared to their non-gifted peers. It was anticipated that the research would point to potential interventions to support gifted students during their secondary schooling years. Data were collected from the 950 students through questionnaires every year. The questionnaires included a range of established scales, including - but not limited to - trait hope, conscientiousness, attitudes to school, self-esteem, problem-solving orientation and the Big Five. Additionally, data on social and emotional adjustment and behaviour were collected from teachers and parents at four time-points across the six years of schooling. Further, the students' school grades were collected twice-yearly. The results demonstrated that overall the gifted group performed better academically than the non-gifted group with some notable exceptions. However, they scored lower on a number of the emotional outcomes and reported less satisfaction with their social supports. On some measures - most notably, self-esteem - there were no differences between the groups and no statistically significant relationship between this factor and academic achievement for the whole cohort. The presentation will outline the detailed relationships across all factors as well as look at the factors that differentiate among high and low achievers within the gifted group (i.e. psychoticism, hope and conscientiousness). The results demonstrate the importance of providing targeted support for gifted students during their schooling years.